

Newport County Unified High School
Exploratory Committee
Minutes

7:00 -8:30 PM – Monday June 23, 2014 – Community College of Rhode Island Auditorium

Attendees

Present: **Barbara A. VonVillas**, Middletown Town Council, Chair; **Justin S. McLaughlin**, Newport City Council, Vice Chair; **Richard P. Adams**, Middletown Town Council; **Marco T. Camacho**, Newport City Council (Scribe); **Kellie E. DiPalma**, Middletown School Committee; **Sandra J. Flowers**, Newport School Committee; **Naomi L. Neville**, Newport City Council; **William R. O’Connell**, Middletown School Committee; **Robert B. Power**, Newport School Committee;

Not Present: None

Approval of Minutes

Approval of the minutes of June 17, 2014 was deferred.

League Of Women Voters (LWV) Public Forum

The LMV moderator, Patty Macleish opened the forum by welcoming attendees and establishing the forum process. She then introduced the members of the Committee and indicated that the purpose of the forum was not to provide definitive answers but to ask questions which the Committee would address.

Ms. McLeish said that “...we are not here this evening to discuss the pros and cons of the referendum, but rather to address to the committee our questions or concerns. We hope that by listening to the responses, you as voters will begin to form the basis for your position on the referendum and that the committee will begin to understand what specific questions voters have to help them as they go forward in their work. If you wish to express an opinion about whether or not the referendum should pass, VOTE! If you wish to persuade others of your opinion, write a letter to the editor. But tonight we are here to begin a dialogue and gather more information.”

Mr. Adams was then introduced to provide a brief presentation. (See attachment.)

Mr. Adams also indicated that attendees should have a list of Frequently Asked Questions. (See attached.)

Following the presentation Ms. Macleish opened the discussion to the audience. She asked that questions be organized as follows:

- Structure, Governance, Administration and Staffing
- Academic Programs
- Funding and Budget Approvals
- School Life
- Other
- Roadmap and Wrap-up

Summary of Questions Asked:

1. One school or more?

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- a. Build one new one?
 - b. Keep the current locations?
 - i. One magnet school?
 - ii. Career & Tech?
2. What does a “Yes” vote mean?
3. Does this reduce cost or raise quality?
 - a. See University of Colorado Study
4. How is the unified school governed?
 - a. Superintendent runs the high school?
 - b. Separate K – 8 in Middletown and Newport?
5. Virtual/digital/blended learning?
6. Clarify offerings
 - a. Reduced or restructured since 1989?
7. Rollover to accreditation, Common Core/PAARC?
8. Per pupil costs – Why are they different?
9. How do the 2 councils approve the share of the total costs?
10. How do you handle suits between Nwpt and Middl if a breakdown happens?
 - b. See Bristol –Warren issues

School Life & Identity

11. What considerations will be made for parental involvement?
12. How do you share sports and other after school activities?
13. Full unification K-12? Is this an option in the future?
14. Are the two communities culturally prepared to combine?

Meetings Calendar

The next meeting is scheduled to be held at the Middletown Public Library on Wednesday, July 2, 2014 at 6:00 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,



Richard Adams

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Welcome to An Informational Meeting and discussion of a Newport-Middletown Unified High School

Sponsored by

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF NEWPORT COUNTY

Monday June 23, 2014

Hosted by the Community College of Rhode Island
Newport Campus



Agenda

- Opening Remarks
Patty McLeish, Moderator, League of Women Voters of Newport County
- Introductory Presentation
Richard Adams, Member Middletown Council and Exploratory Committee
- Questions and Comments (Suggested subject areas):
 - Structure, Governance, Administration and Staffing
 - Academic Programs
 - Funding and Budget Approvals
 - School Life
 - Other
- Roadmap and Wrap-up

Panelists and Members of the Middletown- Newport Unified High School Exploratory Committee

Moderator: Patty McLeish

Members of the Committee and Panel:

Middletown	Newport
Barbara VonVillas, Town Council, Chair	Justin McLaughlin, City Council, V. Chair
Richard Adams, Town Council	Naomi Neville, City Council
Kellie DiPalma, School Committee	Sandra Flowers, School Committee
William O'Connell, School Committee	Robert Power, School Committee
	Marco Camacho, City Council (Alternate), Scribe

A Unified High School

WHY?

Aquidneck Island School Consolidation Was Analyzed in 2009

The Rhode Island Public Expenditures Council (RIPEC) feasibility study addressed School District consolidation. The RIPEC report of June 2009 says in part:

"...Opportunities exist to generate significant savings to the districts through consolidation while enhancing educational opportunities."

Those opportunities should be explored

The Educational Environment and Our Common Challenges

- Increasing Costs
- Decreasing Funding
- Decreasing Enrollment
- Aging Facilities
- Older Population
- Level/Declining Wages and Income
- Increasing Property Taxes

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Economies of scale are possible

Larger Enrollment
Results In
Lower Per Pupil Cost

Economic Growth

Depends on
Quality Education

Quality education is more than...

- ✓ Producing High Test Scores
- ✓ Ranking Schools
- ✓ Learning to Read, Write, And Compute
- ✓ Getting A High School Diploma

What is quality education?

- ✓ Challenging courses to ensure post-graduation career success
- ✓ Skills training to enable high school graduates to get entry-level jobs
- ✓ Support systems to enable all students to become productive members of society

Quality education is preparing young people for life

- ✓ Individual Development
- ✓ Economic Independence
- ✓ Community Involvement

Quality Education Is an Investment in a Community's Future

- ✓ Common Values
- ✓ Economic Stability
- ✓ Civic Responsibility

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In our current environment
how can we ensure
that we provide
quality education?

Create a critical mass of
students with sufficient
numbers to produce
a broad, deep and outstanding
program
for 100% of our students

Create more opportunities for
the college bound student

- ✓ More Advanced Placement
- ✓ More Foreign Languages
- ✓ More Challenging Course Offerings

Create more opportunities for
the diploma graduate

- ✓ More Hands-on Courses
- ✓ More Skills Training
- ✓ More School to Career Partnerships

Create more support for the student
who needs additional help

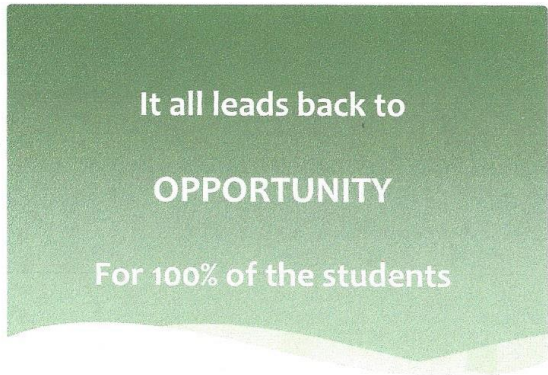

- ✓ Alternative Education
- ✓ Career Guidance
- ✓ Life Skills

Enrollment = Opportunity

High Enrollment = Max Opportunity
Low Enrollment = Min Opportunity

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 <p>It all leads back to OPPORTUNITY For 100% of the students</p>	 <p>What's Ahead Agreements, Approvals Hearings and Referenda</p> <p>On November 4th the voters of Newport and Middletown will be asked to vote on a non-binding question: <i>Should Newport and Middletown join to establish a unified high school?</i> If the referendum questions on the Newport and Middletown ballots are approved, the City and Town Councils will be asked to appoint a joint committee to answer the questions heard tonight and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Propose a framework for a Unified High School and/or Unified District▪ Develop a schedule of events for implementation▪ Draft enabling legislation and agreement between the communities▪ Obtain Councils, School Committees and RIDE approvals▪ Conduct hearing and submit the enabling legislation/agreement to the Councils for approval▪ Place the enabling legislation/agreement on the ballot for voter approval/rejection
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Frequently Asked Questions

The questions and answers below were developed by the Middletown-Newport Unified High School Exploratory Committee over a period of several months. The answers are neither definitive nor final. They are simply the options identified by the Committee, or in some cases the Best Practices in other regional school districts. Should Middletown and Newport citizens decide to pursue high school unification, final decisions will be formulated by the communities over a period of several years.

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Question/Comment	Response
<p>Why should the citizens of Newport and Middletown consider the possibility of forming a Unified High School?</p>	<p>Neither Middletown nor Newport has the resources to support the existing educational structures over the long term. Programs will continue to be reduced or restructured while expenses rise each year. The educational opportunities available to today's students – fewer than those that were available to their parents – are unsustainable.</p> <p>School districts in Newport County are faced with major issues related to sustainability that are irresolvable within the current structure including: 1) increasingly inadequate funding that affects the quality of the academic programs, 2) diminishing enrollments that undermine the ability to serve the needs of all students, 3) a declining competitive workforce that promotes economic growth, and 4) a declining and aging population.</p>
A. Governance and Administration	
<p>A.1. What would be the governance and administrative structure of a Unified High School?</p>	<p>State regulations require a Superintendent. The Unified High School would have its own Superintendent/Principal. A unified high school could be governed in a variety of ways:</p> <p>15. State regulations require a Superintendent. The Unified High School could have its own Superintendent/Principal. A unified high school(s) could be organized as a unique district with its own school committee (separate from the K-8 districts that would be governed by the existing School Committees.) The Unified High School Committee would have equal representation from each community. To avoid tie votes, a majority would be required to approve any Committee action.</p> <p>16. A unified high school(s) could be governed by either the Newport or Middletown Superintendent and School Committee. In this option, the high school(s) would be incorporated into an existing school district. The host School Committee would include representation from both school districts.</p> <p>17. A unified high school(s) could be governed by a unified Middletown-Newport School District. The Unified School Committee would have equal representation from each community.</p>
B. Finances, Affordability and Debt Obligation	
<p>B.1. How would a Unified High School be funded?</p>	<p>A unified high school budget would be developed based on per pupil costs as defined by the RI Department of Education (RIDE). The process would be similar to that used by other regional districts. The funding from each community would follow the student.</p> <p>The budget would be presented to the municipal Councils using the method currently employed for municipal K-12 school districts. The Councils would have bottom line approval. As is presently the case, disagreements would be resolved by negotiations. All debt obligations would remain with Newport and Middletown as is presently the case.</p>

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B.2. <i>How will the Special Education needs of students be met in a unified system?</i>	<p>There are two approaches which would be considered by a unified school committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Special Education services would be provided by the school district as is now the case in Newport, or; 2. Special Education Services would be provided by the Newport County Regional Collaborative as is now the case in Middletown. <p>The decision of which approach to take would be based on an analysis of costs and benefits by the unified school committee. Costs would follow the student, that is, the residence of the student would determine which municipality would pay for the needed special education services. These costs would be included in the budgets submitted to the respective Councils for approval.</p>
C. Staffing Changes	
C.1. Would there be reductions in teachers and staff?	It is unlikely that there would be reductions. As programs and course offerings expand with increase student population, it is more likely that there would be modest increases in staff and/or changes in content areas and programs that affect staff.
C.2 What would happen with employment contracts?	There would be negotiations involving unifying and consolidating existing contracts. Present Middletown and Newport employment contracts are similar but not identical. The differences could be reconciled with “hold harmless” provisions for existing employees.
D. Educational Program Changes	
D.1. How would education programs be enhanced?	A larger student body would result in class enrollments that enable an expansion of advanced courses as well as career development courses.
D.2 How would unifying the student bodies of both schools make a difference?	<p>A student body of 1,300 (instead of 600 or 700) would support classes and programs that cannot be offered now because there are insufficient students to fill the seats.</p> <p>For example, a class selected by only 6-8 students must be cancelled, but it could be scheduled if 15 or more students selected the class. Larger class enrollments would also enable an expansion of advanced courses as well as school-to-work courses.</p>

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D.3 How would the curriculum be enhanced?	<p>Currently, both schools are doing the best they can within the constraints of the taxpayers' ability to pay. The schools have held onto some advanced classes, but other areas have been eliminated.</p> <p>For example, MHS staffing data reflects a total reduction of 23.5 staff members from 1989 to 2014 with a concurrent increase of 6.0 in Special Education for a net reduction of 17.5 staff. In general, tested subjects such as math and science have been protected while social studies and school-to-career programs have been significantly reduced.</p> <p>MHS is not alone in decreasing student opportunities. Newport's Superintendent recently reported, "Electives are not being offered at Rogers High School because staffing is so tight.... The good news is the most requested classes are science; the sad news is Rogers has not been able to offer these due to staffing reductions or scheduling conflicts." She added, "Student registrations show more requests for math courses than staff to meet the requests."</p> <p>A larger student body would enable staff to be used more efficiently within content areas enabling expansion into other content areas. As the Unified High School Committee continues its work, it will be listening to what kinds of programs our communities would like for their children. With a critical mass of students, we should be able to build a program that the communities support.</p>
D.4 How would career education be enhanced?	Career education would be expanded in multiple ways. The Career & Technical School programs would be expanded to more fields and developed to include partnerships with post-secondary institutions as well as connections with business and industry. Students with specific career aspirations could commit to full programs while other students could explore career fields on a space-available basis as well as in stand-alone electives that are not currently available.
D.5 Would there be changes in the elementary or middle school curriculum?	Collaboration would take place to develop a common curriculum so that all the students entering the unified high school would have the same curricular preparation and would be fully prepared for high school studies.
D.6. How would unification affect elementary and middle school students?	Unification does not alter current middle school or elementary school arrangements. Newport's Pell Elementary School and Thompson Middle School are new and will not change. Middletown is now considering a refurbishment and building plan for all the schools. The plan is for renovation and repair needed regardless of any unification activity and will proceed, or not, irrespective of high school unification.
E. Transitions, Facilities, Transportation, School Spirit,	

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E.1. Is a new high school being proposed as part of unification?	<p>The Unified Committee is not proposing a new school. If and when a regional high school is proposed, the cost would be distributed among the state and the participating communities – approximately 40%, 30%, 30% respectively.</p> <p>Both existing high schools are in need of expensive renovations. The operating costs of one new building would be lower than the costs of renovating and operating two older buildings.</p> <p>Middletown’s facilities plan includes construction beginning in 2016 of a new \$58 million high school, not including a gym or auditorium, followed by the renovation of MHS as an elementary school for \$45 million.</p> <p>Newport’s renovations would include a new roof at a projected \$1.5 mil and a new track at \$1 mil, not including other maintenance costs.</p> <p>Capital costs and bonding would be the responsibility of Newport and Middletown separately.</p>
E.2. What would be the financial benefits of a constructing a single regional high school?	<p>Both existing high schools are in need of expensive renovations. In addition, the operating costs of one building would be lower than the costs of operating two buildings.</p>
E.3. How would the two high schools be transitioned to one school?	<p>Community and parental involvement are the key to successful unification. The Newport Pell School elementary consolidation and Middletown’s creation of a grades 4-6 Learning Academy required years of meeting and consultations with parents, school staff, school and city administrations. These are models of how successful unification should proceed.</p>
E.4 What is the timeline for the transition to a single high school?	<p>A transition period would allow the combining of students to form a critical mass for curriculum expansion and development. There are a number of different options being considered, but the committee would like to hear ideas from the public.</p>
E.5. What transition plans are under consideration for unification while a new regional high school is in the planning and development stages?	<p>The goal would be to begin to create larger enrollments that would make possible the development of new courses or the restoration of opportunities that have been lost as the enrollment has declined.</p>
E.6 How would transportation be managed?	<p>The communities would continue to transport their students. Collaboration within each town (9-12 and Prek-8) and across towns (common geographic areas) would ensure efficiency.</p>

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Question/Comment	Response
E.7. How would the students be unified to create a critical mass prior to planning for a new regional high school?	<p>There are a number of options including the following:</p> <p>One existing school could focus on college prep programs while the other could focus on career prep programs.</p> <p>The 9th and 10th grades could attend one school, and 11th and 12th grades could attend the other.</p> <p>The schools in one community could be re-organized, moving grade 4 back to the elementary schools; the 9th grade could move to the middle school, and grades 10-12 could be combined.</p> <p>These are only a few of the possible options, but a transition period would allow the combining of students to form a critical mass for program expansion and development.</p>
F. Extracurricular Activities and Sports	
F.1. Both MHS and RHS have built reputations that foster loyalty within the communities. What would make me want to change anything that seems to be working so well?	<p>Aquidneck Island was once served by a single regional high school, Rogers High School. A unified high school can build its own loyalties, customs and support base in the same way Middletown and Portsmouth did since taking separate paths years ago.</p> <p>Education is more than a location. Education is an opportunity for all students to reach their highest potential. They cannot do that when their opportunities are limited because the low number of students does not support the range of courses that would meet the needs of all the students.</p>
F.2. How would unification affect the athletic programs?	The number of athletic team and individual sports opportunities would increase.
F.3. How would unification affect extracurricular activities?	The number of team, intramural, and individual sports as well as extracurricular opportunities would increase as staff could be used more efficiently.

Newport Daily News

June 24, 2014

School-related forums attended by few

Unified high school question needs more specifics, committee is told

By Matt Sheley

NEWPORT — Fewer than 25 people attended an informational forum Monday night about a proposal to establish a joint high school for Newport and Middletown students, mostly school officials from both communities who gathered amid rows of empty seats in the auditorium at the Community College of Rhode Island.

Members of the Newport County Unified High School Exploratory Committee have been meeting since the

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beginning of the year, and the councils in both communities have agreed to put a nonbinding question on the Nov. 4 ballot to gauge community support for such a concept.

"We're asking voters if there's a will and interest in pursuing education in a unified way," Naomi L. Neville, a member of the exploratory committee and vice chairwoman of the Newport City Council, said during Monday's forum, sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Newport County.

The session was billed as the first step in a rollout leading up to the election, during which voters will be asked whether the committee should continue its work.

The committee has as its goals providing more opportunities for students along with saving money. A June 2009 report from the Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council found the three island communities, including Portsmouth, stood to save close to \$13 million if they combined schools by fiscal 2013.

Other communities in Newport County did not join the unification effort, spearheaded by Middletown Town Council members Richard P. Adams and Barbara A. VonVillas.

Monday's forum was intended to outline the steps taken to date by the exploratory committee. Among the topics on the agenda for discussion were how a joint high school would be governed and staffed, how it would be paid for, and what school life might look like for students.

Throughout the session Monday night, a handful of speakers approached a microphone set up at the front of the auditorium, looking for specifics about what would happen next should the nonbinding questions be approved on Election Day.

While committee members provided some details, such as describing a general formula in which money would follow students and each municipality would be responsible for its own debt, many in the audience seemed to be frustrated by a lack of specifics.

That sentiment was summed up best by Middletown School Committee Chairwoman Theresa Silveira Spengler, who asked how residents could vote on a concept about which there were so few details.

"How do people support a 'Yes' or 'No' position when they don't have information about what they're voting for?" Spengler asked.

In response, several of the eight members of the exploratory committee said providing that level of detail has not been part of the group's work yet. Rather than investing too much time in the nitty gritty, committee members said, they wanted to see if there was support for the unification idea overall, which would give the group clearance to delve deeper into the subject.

If voters in Newport and Middletown vote in favor of the concept in November, committee members said, the group would work on a framework for taking the next steps, including seeking approval from Newport and Middletown councils and school boards, along with the state. Then, committee members said, voters in each community would be asked to support a binding question authorizing the formation of a unified high school.

"The big question is, is there a will in Newport and Middletown to move forward?" said Robert B. Power, a member of the exploratory committee and the Newport School Committee.

No matter what happens, several people in attendance agreed there was a need to help elevate area schools.

"It's obvious academics need to be enhanced across this country, because we're falling further and further behind," said Newport resident Diana Crowley.